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SAN DIEGO

SAN DIEGO MAN ORDERED DEPORTED FOR WORLD WAR II ACTIVITIES

A former European athlete who coached at San Diego schools has been ordered deported for allegedly taking part in the persecution of communists and Jews in Latvia during World War II, officials said.

Edgars Laipenieks, 70, who left his native Latvia after the war and became a citizen of Chile before emigrating to the United States, was ordered deported to Chile by the five-member Board of Immigration Appeals in Washington, D.C.

The board said Wednesday that a review of Laipenieks' deportation trial record showed "clear and convincing evidence" that he participated in "persecution" of individuals in Latvia's Riga Central Prison "because of their political opinions."

Laipenieks, a former coach at La Jolla Country Day School and the San Diego Military Academy, steadfastly denied during his deportation hearing that he was involved in war crimes.

"In Latvia, I was fighting the communists who had occupied my country," he said in testimony punctuated by sobs. He admitted striking Riga inmates during interrogation, but said he did not beat anyone or carry a truncheon.

The panel concurred with Justice Department attorneys Bruce J. Einhorn and Clarice Feldman that Laipenieks, in working with the Latvian Political Police during the Nazi occupation, was active in an organization "analogous to the Gestapo."

The appeals board thus vacated a June 9, 1982, decision by Immigration Judge John C. Williams that Laipenieks, who served as a CIA informant after the war, was free to remain here because the government had failed to prove he was involved in war crimes.

Williams handed down his decision at the conclusion of a lengthy deportation hearing that produced 2,000 pages of testimony into brutality at Riga Central Prison during Nazi occupation.

Testimony included videotaped depositions from witnesses still in Latvia, now part of the Soviet Union.

The stocky, white-haired Laipenieks testified he was a member of the anti-communist Latvian Political Department before the Soviets occupied Latvia.

After Germany occupied the Baltic state in 1941, Laipenieks said he was recruited into the Latvian Political Police.

He said his responsibility with this organization was to hunt down communists who stayed behind and agents and terrorists who were being filtered in by the Soviet Union.

Laipenieks participated in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, coached Chile's track team in 1952 and 1956 and coached the Mexican team in 1964.